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SOVIET MOBILE ICBM PROGRAM

SS-X-16. Developmental flight testing of the SS-X-16 was probably completed in late 1975. The last test was in April 1976. There as yet, is no conclusive evidence of deployment, although CIA believes deployment of operational units at Plesetsk may occur. The Soviets at the Moscow Summit indicated that they had no plans to deploy the SS-X-16 in the context of a ban on mobile ICBMs. There are five or possibly six sites under construction associated with the mobile SS-X-20, but which appear capable of housing and launching the SS-X-16.

The SS-X-20/SS-X-16 Problem. We have not firmly identified the SS-X-20 mobile erector-launcher and ground support equipment which thus far appears also capable of being used with the SS-X-16 ICBM, with little or no modification. Even if the Soviets did not attempt to use the SS-X-20 deployments to conceal SS-X-16 ICBMs, the similarities in launchers could pose major problems for the US in verifying Soviet compliance with any limits on mobile ICBMs. The only difference in ground support equipment thus far identified between the two systems is the length of the missile canisters (the SS-X-16 canister is several feet longer than that of the SS-X-20). The first two stages of the SS-X-20 are similar, if not identical, to the first two stages of the SS-X-16, and it is possible that the three-stage SS-X-16 without the warhead package installed can be placed in the canister associated with the SS-X-20.

The SS-X-16 Third-Stage "Breakout" Problem. The issue here is whether and if so how rapidly the deployed SS-X-20 IRBMs could be converted into SS-X-16 ICBMs at some "breakout" point in the future. Since there appears to be great similarity between the first two stages of the two systems, it may be feasible for deployed SS-X-20 IRBMs to be transformed into ICBMs by installing the SS-X-16's third stage and payload package. The ease with which this conversion could be done would depend importantly on whether the two missiles were designed specifically with such conversion in mind. Although the Soviets appear to have emphasized commonality of components in designing the SS-X-20 and SS-X-16, there is no conclusive evidence one way or the other that the missiles are also designed for rapid conversion into ICBMs through the installation of a third stage and payload.

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